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 ON PAGE B-13"

NEW YORK TIMES
 6 June 1985

Money Said to Have Replaced Ideology as Main Spy Motive

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 Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 5 — "Money is the dominant reason" Americans now choose to spy for the Soviet Union, according to Stansfield Turner, a former Director of Central Intelligence.

Admiral Turner, who served in the Carter Administration, and other former officials concerned with national security agreed in separate interviews today that ideology was no longer the main reason Americans commit espionage, as it was in the 1940's and 1950's.

They suggested it was much more difficult to capture a spy acting for financial gain than those who do it for reasons of ideology. The current spy case involving three members of the Walker family was broken only after the former wife of one took her story to the authorities.

Ideology in Rosenberg Case

Perhaps the most famous case involving ideology in the United States was the one that led to the execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, a case that still stirs sharp argument over their guilt today, 32 years after their execution. They were the only Americans ever executed in the United States after a civilian trial for espionage, having been convicted of transmitting nuclear weapons secrets to the Soviet Union.

Another was the perjury conviction of Alger Hiss, a former State Depart-

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ment official imprisoned when he denied charges brought against him by Whittaker Chambers. Mr. Hiss has long denied guilt.

William E. Colby, who headed the Central Intelligence Agency from 1973 to 1976, said the Hiss case and the Philby-Burgess-Maclean spy ring case in Britain involved activities that occurred "when the Soviet Union represented antifascism and there were a lot of ideological recruits."

Ideology as an espionage motive fell off with the Hitler-Stalin nonaggression pact and later with the information provided by Nikita Khrushchev when he denounced the horrors of Stalin's regime, Mr. Colby said.

More Potential Recruits

The current investigation, involving John A. Walker and others, presents problems typical of those that the United States must deal with these days, the intelligence experts said.

"John Walker is a money case," Admiral Turner said.

Gene R. LaRocque, a retired admiral who is director of the Center for Defense Information, a group often critical of the Reagan Administration, said the development of spying-for-money was dangerous because the field of potential recruits is so much larger.

"The ideologues are few in number," he said. "The people who want a little more cash are legion."

Griffin B. Bell, the Attorney General in the Carter Administration, said changing values were also having an effect in a number of recent spy cases.

"With the breakdown in values, partly because of Vietnam and partly Watergate, and a looseness in general discipline, both social and organizational, secrets are held in much more contempt," Mr. Bell said. "The 'me' generation and 'I'll make it on my own' have led to recent circumstances that have been financially based."

Asked to review the spy cases he knew about as the nation's chief prosecutor, Mr. Bell said, "I don't know of any ideological recruits."

Few Leads With Money Cases

A knowledgeable intelligence source, who would not permit use of his name, had this appraisal:

"In counterespionage, if you can identify ideological groups, that's wonderful. But when it's pure cash for sale, you don't have any leads. It makes searching for the agents much more difficult, if not impossible."

Morton Halperin, a Pentagon and National Security Council official from 1966 to 1969, agreed that ideology was no longer the main motive for espionage and said this undercut the notion that the Government should investigate the ideological past of Americans.

"The people convicted in the past seemed to have acted out of political reasons," Mr. Halperin said. Now, he said, it would seem to matter less that a person was once a member of the Communist or Socialist Party, or the Americans for Democratic Action.

Prosecution Policy Change

Mr. Halperin is now director of the Center for National Security Affairs, which deals with security and civil liberties matters and has been critical of Reagan Administration policies.

Another change noted by Mr. Halperin was that the Government was now prosecuting people who spy for money.

"In the past," he said, "the Government would make them double agents or feed them false information. That would cast doubt on the information they had sent previously. Also, if you prosecute, you blow your double agent."

Mr. Halperin noted that it was Mr. Bell who, as Attorney General, had changed that policy.

Mr. Bell said he had decided to prosecute such cases because "I always thought we were going to have to have more sentences to do something about it."

"We do need to have more trials, more examples, more long prison terms," he said, "if we are going to bring it under control."